

December 2023

Lykaion Publishing
Bronx Project Series

Why 'Civil War' Fantasy Movies Are F'in Stupid, (Riot Porn)



"The next film from director Alex Garland looks like quite the action-packed dystopia. A24 just released the first trailer for Civil War, which is set in a near-future version of the US that is, as you can probably guess, in the midst of a violent civil war, with forces from Texas and California making their way to the White House. It's hard to glean too many story details from the trailer, but it features a small group attempting to infiltrate a heavily fortified Washington, DC. It also features the tagline "all empires fall," so you know things aren't going so well." -Andrew Webster, The Verge (2023)

Riot porn refers to media, such as photographs or videos, that sensationalizes or glamorizes riotous or violent events. It might also be used to describe content that focuses on the spectacle or excitement of riots rather than addressing the underlying issues or causes.

*"Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend,
Nay show'd his faults—but when would poets mend?
No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's churchyard:
Nay, fly to altars; there they'll talk you dead:
For fools rush in where angels fear to tread." -Alexander Pope (1711)*

While the trailer provides limited insight into the narrative specifics, the portrayal of a fractured nation with forces from Texas and California converging on Washington, D.C., may oversimplify the intricacies of real-world civil conflicts.

It is essential to recognize that civil wars, with their profound societal repercussions, demand nuanced understanding and accurate representation in media. Unrealistic portrayals can potentially contribute to misunderstandings and simplistic views on the challenges and consequences associated with such conflicts.

The complexities of the civil conflict, with its myriad factors contributing to violence and social unrest, should not be reduced to a mere backdrop for cinematic entertainment.

The film "Civil War," appears to lack consideration for critical elements such as MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain) strategy employed by the U.S. Army, the principles of 4th generation warfare, society-centric warfare, and network-centric warfare. Psychological warfare, logistics, and the nuanced considerations of real historical parallels seem to be critical elements overlooked in the film, contributing to its unrealistic nature.

FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) implemented The Marquetalia Republic, a strategy characterized by guerrilla warfare, mobility, and the use of rugged terrain to their advantage. Their focus on denying access to federal forces, and countering rival factions aligns with the realities of asymmetrical warfare.

FARC engaged in urban warfare as well, carrying out activities like kidnappings, bombings, and ransom operations within cities. FARC engaged in the kidnapping of individuals, including civilians, politicians, and security personnel. This tactic was used to both exert control over the population and to secure ransom payments, which could then be used to fund their operations. FARC conducted bombings in urban areas as a means of creating fear, disrupting government operations (area denial tactics), and pressuring authorities. Targets often included government buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces.

In addition to kidnapping, the FARC sought to extract ransoms in exchange for the release of hostages. The funds obtained through these operations could be used to finance their activities.

These tactics in urban areas allowed the FARC to extend their influence beyond traditional rural strongholds. By bringing the conflict into cities, they aimed to destabilize the government, instill fear among the population, and raise funds to sustain their insurgency.

This strategic approach diverges significantly from the simplistic and overtly aggressive depiction of popular sovereign militias from Texas & California attempting to conquer the nation's capital in the film.

FARC's approach, characterized by a blend of guerrilla warfare and targeted urban operations, served to disrupt the command and control (C2) capabilities of the state and weaken its political infrastructure.

The FARC's retreat to mountain hideouts, where they could establish intergenerational warfare by providing sanctuary for families, women, and children, aligns with a comprehensive strategy aimed at sustaining their insurgency over an extended period. Engaging in agriculture within these hideouts facilitated self-sufficiency while contributing to the broader narrative of the struggle, notably the pursuit of land reform, a dimension explored in scholarly works, on the agrarian origins of civil conflict in Colombia.

The use of land mines to protect their territory also highlights the guerrilla group's commitment to defending their strongholds against external threats. This defensive strategy further exemplifies the asymmetric nature of the conflict and the lengths to which insurgent groups would go to secure their operational bases.

The dense jungle terrain had long served as a natural refuge for the FARC, allowing them to conduct operations with relative impunity and complicating the efforts of government forces to locate and engage them.

Clausewitz emphasizes the importance of maintaining the initiative in warfare. According to him, military leaders should strive to control the course of events and dictate the terms of engagement. This aligns with the proactive nature of active defense, where the goal is to engage the enemy on one's own terms rather than passively reacting to their actions. This strategy involves engaging an adversary as early as possible, disrupting their plans, and preventing them from achieving their objectives.

Unlike a purely defensive strategy, which might involve waiting for an enemy to attack and then responding, it aims to gain the initiative by taking the fight to the enemy before they can fully execute their plans.

In contrast to FARC's asymmetric strategy, the film's central plot revolves around Texas & California attempting to conquer Washington, D.C., using large-scale ground combat operations.

LSGCO refers to military operations that involve a significant deployment of ground forces over a wide area. It encompasses large-scale battles and campaigns that may involve multiple units, formations, and theaters of operation. These operations typically require strategic planning, coordination, and the integration of various military assets, including infantry, armor, artillery, and support elements.

Operation Cobra was a crucial offensive launched by the Allied forces in Normandy, France, during July 1944. The goal was to break through the heavily fortified German defensive lines following the D-Day landings. General Omar N. Bradley, a prominent U.S. military leader, played a key role in planning and executing this operation.

Following the success of Operation Cobra, the Allies pursued the retreating German forces towards the Falaise Gap. The Falaise Pocket became a critical battleground, where Allied forces sought to encircle and defeat a significant portion of the German army.

The application of the principles of war during Operation Cobra and the Falaise Gap Maneuvers should be highlighted as being critical to the operation's success. These principles could include aspects like mass, maneuver, objective, offensive, unity of command, etc.

Clausewitz stresses the need for unity of command and the coordinated use of different arms (infantry, cavalry, artillery) in achieving strategic objectives. LSGCO would necessitate careful coordination and integration of various military elements.

This strategic approach diverges significantly from the simplistic and overtly aggressive depiction of militias from Texas & California attempting to conquer the nation's capital in the film.

Technological advancements in satellite imagery and drone technology, with their capacity to navigate and surveil dense jungle terrain, altered the strategic landscape. This technological shift stripped away a significant layer of the guerrilla group's defensive advantage, making it more challenging for them to maintain the level of operational security they had enjoyed.

The integration of serious games like Project Camelot and COCON-POLITICA, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in internal national conflicts and revolutionary conflict conditions. Issues raised during the Army After Next spring wargame sheds light on the evolving nature of military strategies, emphasizing adaptability and the incorporation of technology.

The examination of Operation Jade Helm and public opinion, as well as the psychological dimensions highlighted by Calum Matheson, provides a valuable contemporary context. This analysis extends to the utilization of military deception (MILDEC) in counterinsurgency operations, and the role of social psychology in counter-insurgency efforts.

State failure and internecine warfare often result from a combination of internal and external factors. In the case of African states, the breakdown of law and order, as highlighted in the Congo Crisis (Rivkin, 1960), is a crucial starting point. This breakdown creates a vacuum of power and governance, leading to the onset of terror and the collapse of the state structure.

This instability arises from various causes, including economic decline, inequitable distribution of resources, and the polarization between different social groups (Zolberg, 1968). These rebellions are marked by fragmentation, feuding leadership, and the absence of a unifying ideology (Young, 1965).

External influences, as seen in Colombia and Latin America's tier of turmoil (Robinson, 1999), can exacerbate conflicts. The arming of Nicaraguan rebels by the United States, under the pretext of interdicting arms flow, reveals how geopolitical interests can play a role in destabilizing regions. The failure of the centralized state in Africa (Wunsch & Olowu, 1990) points out that power struggles intensify within regimes once constitutional rules are discarded. This internal factionalism, mutual distrust, and fear contribute to the destabilization of the state.

Quasi-permanent military rule then becomes the norm (Decalo, 1989) with military administrators governing a significant portion of the continent. Civilian rule becomes a distant memory in some countries, and attempted coups or military-sponsored plots further destabilize governance.

By delving into the historical roots of Colombia's civil conflict & the failure of African States, we can derive a realistic template that reflects the intricate interplay of societal, political, and military dynamics.

Triggering Event (Year 0):

- Charismatic figure's assassination triggers societal unrest, similar to the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

2. Immediate Unrest & Breakdown of Law and Order (Year 0-1):

- Swift and spontaneous eruption of unrest, leading to urban violence and the breakdown of law and order, comparable to the Bogotazo. This breakdown creates a vacuum of power and governance.

3. Prolonged Period of Instability & Internal Factors: Economic Decline, Inequitable Distribution of Resources (Year 1-3):

- Protracted period marked by political, ideological, and factional clashes, fostering the emergence of armed groups, akin to the Violencia lasting into the 1950s. Economic decline, inequitable resource distribution, and polarization among social groups contribute to the rebellions.

4. Formation of Insurgent Movements, Fragmentation and Feuding Leadership (Year 2-4):

- Insurgent movements emerge, driven by societal grievances and a desire for change, gaining substantial support from disenfranchised segments of the population, and the absence of a unifying ideology in the insurgency reflect the fragmentation.

5. External Influence, International Attention, Evolution into Guerrilla Warfare (Year 3-6):

- The conflict evolves into guerrilla warfare, characterized by hit-and-run tactics, territorial control, and a blend of military and political objectives, reflecting the FARC's origins in the early 1960s.
- The conflict gains international attention which can play a role in destabilizing regions, potentially leading to external involvement, recognition, or mediation, echoing the international dimensions seen in Colombia's historical trajectory.

6. Open Insurgency, Internal Factionalism and Military Rule (Year 5+):

- No doubt exists that the government is facing an insurgency. Politically, insurgents overtly challenge state authority, developing a "shadow government." Militarily, insurgents stage more frequent, aggressive, and sophisticated attacks, involving larger numbers of fighters.
- The open insurgency stage and quasi-permanent military rule in the insurgency timeline align with the theory's point about power struggles intensifying within regimes and the establishment of military rule. Civilian rule becomes challenging, and governance faces destabilization due to internal factionalism and military-sponsored plots.

Drawing parallels between the historical trajectory of Yugoslavia and the hypothetical scenario in "Civil War" underscores the impact of shifting identities, and the potential for territorial rearrangements. The dissolution of Yugoslavia saw the emergence of independent states, each grappling with its own identity and territorial claims contribute to societal fragmentation. In the hypothetical scenario presented in "Civil War," the depiction of a divided America reflects the theme of Balkanization.

However the film "Civil War" presents a misguided and simplistic portrayal of strategy within the context of popular sovereign movements. Logistically, the challenges associated with mobilizing and sustaining militias across vast distances render the depicted scenario implausible.

The strategic significance of cities (represented by the blue areas,) are highlighted as centers of gravity; politically powerful and economically dominant. The concentration of political power in urban areas aligns with the concept of urban centers being political symbols.

The importance of urban operations, psychological dominance, and information warfare is emphasized in the open insurgency stage (Year 5+). As militias challenge state authority, the dynamics of urban warfare become crucial, and the military and ideological struggles may intensify within cities.

Furthermore, during the open insurgency stage, control of the urban masses becomes a critical factor for both the insurgents and the government. Concepts such as cordon operations, controlling the city from outside, align with the idea of insurgents challenging state authority and the government's response. This tactical approach emphasizes information dominance and strategic control in dealing with urban areas during insurgency. The Colombian conflict, with its rich history of guerrilla warfare, societal engagement, and adaptability, serves as a stark example of this, and the film's apparent shortcomings in this area.

The ongoing political struggle between the blue (Bureaucracy) and red (labor-manpower) areas, highlighted throughout the timeline, represents a classic counter-insurgency wargame. The timeline captures the evolving dynamics of the political struggle, from the triggering event to the open insurgency stage.

The decision by the FARC to pursue a peace agreement in the wake of these technological developments underscores their recognition of the changing dynamics and the increasing difficulty of sustaining their insurgency. The shift towards negotiations and a political settlement can be seen as a pragmatic response to the evolving military landscape, where their traditional tactics faced growing vulnerabilities.

It's worth noting that the peace agreement, while marking a formal end to the armed conflict, also opened a new chapter in the post-conflict era, bringing its own set of challenges related to disarmament, reintegration, and addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Bibliography:

1. CIA. "Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency." (2012): 2.
2. Decalo, Samuel. "Modalities of Civil-Military Stability in Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1989, pp. 547–578., doi:10.1017/S0022278X00020449.
3. Glenn, Russell W, and Geri Cherry. *The City's Many Faces: Proceedings of the Rand Arroyo-Mcwl-J8 Uwg Urban Operations Conference*, April 13-14, 1999. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000, pp. 158-163.
4. Gordon, Martin, et al. *COCON-COUNTERCONSPIRACY (POLITICA): THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SIMULATION OF INTERNAL NATIONAL CONFLICT UNDER REVOLUTIONARY CONFLICT CONDITIONS. VOLUME 1*. ABT ASSOCIATES INC CAMBRIDGE MA, 1966.
5. Granier, Thomas R., and AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLL MAXWELL AFB AL. *Analysis of Operation Cobra and the Falaise Gap Maneuvers in World War II*. Air Command and Staff College, Air University, 1985.

6. López-Urbe, María del Pilar, and Fabio Sanchez Torres. "On the agrarian origins of civil conflict in Colombia." LSE-Stanford-Universidad de los Andes Conference on Long-Run Development in Latin America. London School of Economics and Political Science, May. 2018.
7. Matheson, Calum. "'What does Obama want of me?' Anxiety and Jade Helm 15." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 102.2 (2016): 133-149.
8. Rivkin, Arnold. "The Congo Crisis in World Affairs." *Civilisations* 10.4 (1960): 473-479.
9. Robinson, Linda. "Where angels fear to tread: Colombia and Latin America's tier of turmoil." *World Policy Journal* 16.4 (1999): 63-71.
10. Romjue, John L. *From active defense to AirLand Battle: The development of Army doctrine, 1973-1982*. Historical Office, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1984.
11. Scales Jr, Robert H. *Adaptive Enemies. Achieving Victory by Avoiding Defeat*. NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV WASHINGTON DC INST FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES, 2000.
12. Wunsch, James S., and Dele Olowu. "The failure of the centralized African state." *The Failure of the Centralized State: Institutions and Self-Governance in Africa* (1990): 1-22.
13. Young, M. Crawford. "The Congo Rebellion." *Africa Report* 10.4 (1965): 6.
14. Zolberg, Aristide R. "The Structure of Political Conflict in the New States of Tropical Africa." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1968, pp. 70–87., doi:10.2307/1953327.

###